16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

[581] [586] divorce your husband or your wife without good—very good and sufficient cause. And what is good and sufficient cause is very well understood. That a woman should have a nagging tongue, that a man should be a drunkard, what could be better cause than this? The gravity of the offence lies in whether it makes life unbearable together, not in the name you may give it.

The facility for divorce has other effects too. It makes a man and a woman very careful in their behaviour to each other. The chain that binds them is a chain of mutual forbearance, of mutual endurance, of mutual love; and if these be broken, then is the bond gone. Marriage is no fetter about a man or woman, binding both to that which they may get to hate.

[175] [727] In the first Burmese war in 1825 there was a man, an Englishman, taken prisoner in Ava and put in prison, and there he found certain Europeans and Americans. And after a time, for fear of attempts at escape, these prisoners were chained together two and two. And he tells you, this Englishman, how terrible this was, and of the hate and repulsion that arose in your heart to your co-bondsman. Before they were chained together they lived in close neighbourhood, in peace and amity; but when the chains came it was far otherwise, though they were no nearer than before. They got to hate each other.

And this is the Burmese idea of marriage, that it is a partnership of love and affection, and that when these die, all should be over. An unbreakable marriage appears to them as a fetter, a bond, something hateful and hate inspiring. You see, they are

Zia Hsin Aung B-5 (ca. 1980) 1987 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

101 536 538 walked up and down the stage—a dramatic practice which was taken from the Siamese and used on the Burmese stage. The language was the language of the court, artificial, but not so removed from reality as to prevent it from being understood by the lowest classes. The play was mostly in verse. The prose was poetic and elegant except in comic scenes.

[175] When the Burmese conquered Siam in 1767, they were able to take the play back with them for various reasons. The play was to both nations a *Jataka* story. The manners and the language of the Siamese court, as depicted in the play, were similar in many ways to those of the Burmese court. The mythology was common to both nations. The play was easy of reproduction at the Burmese court because of the many characteristics common to both countries, and because the captive and exiled members of the Siamese nobility at the Burmese court were ready and willing to help not only because they were anxious to teach the new art to their conquerors, but also because they missed an entertainment to which they had been accustomed for generations.

3. The *Rāma* Play at the Burmese Court

175 669 727 The age that followed the conquest of Siam in 1767 was one of triumph. In 1752 the Burmese Empire had been destroyed by the Talaings, and the conquerors were ruthlessly putting into practice their policy of stopping the continual war between Burmese and Talaing by exterminating the Burmese as a race. In the same year, however, a humble villager arose, rallied the Burmese around him, with the result that five years later the mighty Talaing Empire was destroyed and the Talaings as a race disappeared from Burma. The obscure villager became the great Alaungpaya, founder of the famous dynasty that bore his name. He tried to conquer Siam, but died when victory was in sight. His son, Hsinbyushin, carried on the war, and continued the extension of the Empire. Manipur was soon conquered, and in 1767 Siam was completely crushed and its capital destroyed. The Siamese court was taken captive to the Burmese capital. The weary army was given no rest, however, for the Chinese had invaded Burma. From 1765 to 1769, the Chinese carried on a serious campaign against Burma. There were four distinct invasions, but each was repulsed. In 1769, the Chinese defeat was complete. Of that age of triumph, Harvey says:

> The victory [against the Chinese], coming as it did on top of a

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

generation of continual warfare which might well have exhausted the race, shows that the exploits of Alaungpaya were no mere flash in the pan, but were broad-based on the energy of the race as a whole. . . . The chronicles for the period are verbose and pompous, but it is impossible to read them without being struck with their fierce pride.[1]

It was during this age of triumph, after the Chinese invaders had been sent back defeated and people could breathe again without anxiety, that the Siamese *Rama* was produced at the Burmese court for the first time.

The court of Ava, then the capital of Burma, was in many ways comparable to the court of Elizabeth after the victory over Spain. Glory and wealth and splendour surrounded the king and his courtiers. Masters in the arts of war, they were also masters in the arts of peace. Almost everyone was learned, and the ablest soldiers and statesmen were also the foremost poets. Queens and ladies-in-waiting vied with princes and lords in the study and practice of learning and literature. Experts in the study of Pali, Sanskrit, and Buddhistic lore, keen students of foreign institutions and literatures, they were essentially Burmese, and enriched their own language and literature with borrowings from all sources. The period 1770 to 1824, the date of the first British conquest, that period of triumph, may easily be termed the age of translations, so keen were the people for knowledge from all sources. Siamese romances, Pali *Jatakas*, Chinese histories, Siamese and Cambodian chronicles, a history of Portugal, a Sanskrit work on sexual science—this list made at random shows clearly the range and variety of the translations. The court led the people in the pursuit of learning and literature. The courtiers were learned, the king was a patron of learning, and at the court the captives and hostages numbered among them great scholars and poets from conquered States. After the toils of war, men turned towards learning for rest and recreation. Men gloried in their country and studied their own literature, history, and institutions, and that study naturally led to the study of those of other countries. Almost everyone studied and almost everyone wrote. The age of triumph was an age of learning.[2]

The Siamese court plays appealed to the imagination of the court. The Siamese captives longed for their native entertainment.

[1] *History of Burma*, p. 258.

[2] Some account of the learned atmosphere of the court and of its more famous translators and poets is given by G. E. Harvey, op. cit., pp. 249 and 250.